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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTIONS UPDATE 12/10/07

REF: TBILISI 3046

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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OSCE Ambassadorial Meeting  
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¶1. (C) On 7 December, members of the OSCE Ambassadorial Working Group were provided a copy of the letter sent by Ambassador Terhi Hakala, Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, to Acting President Nino Burjanadze. In the letter, Hakala outlined the main issues which need to be addressed to ensure the elections are free and fair (reftel) and requested an English language copy of the final version of the Unified Electoral Code and the contact information for an interlocutor to whom the international community could address electoral issues.

¶2. (C) During the meeting, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Monitoring Team, Ambassador Dieter Boden, a German diplomat who from 1999-2002 served as the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Georgia, and Matias Eorsi, Chief of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) Monitoring Group, briefed the group on their plans and concerns leading up to January 5 election. Ambassador Boden said that his group would issue two reports, one due out by 17 December, and the second which will be completed after Christmas but before New Year's Day. Ambassador Boden expects that short-term and long-term observers will be able to cover 90 percent of the precincts on election day. Eorsi shared with the group his observations and concerns:

- Voters claim they are being intimidated by police and government authorities. Often the intimidation is subtle, and voters are reluctant to appeal to law enforcement bodies for fear of retribution.

- The perception of misuse of government resources exists widely. While in some instances these perceptions may be valid, alleged abuses are interpreted as a breach of public trust.

- The focus of some opposition groups is January 6 and not Election Day. Some are already presupposing that the elections will not be open and fair and formulating their plans. Eorsi stressed that all entities need to work with government institutions to create an atmosphere of trust in the electoral system.

- The misconception that cameras will monitor voters in the precincts. Some voters are concerned that the cameras in polling stations, ostensibly for monitoring the voters' list and the ballot box, may be used to monitor their vote selection. Eorsi said that the CEC needs to stress the secrecy of the ballot to allay these fears. Ambassador said that during the local elections cameras were used and no one

complained to observers about this issue.

- Russian Members may request to be part of OSCE/ODIHR Short Term Observer Teams (STOs). The consensus of the group was that to their knowledge no Russians had applied to be part of the team, but even if this should occur, the Georgians would be powerless to alter the composition even though they may oppose it.

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ODIHR Ambassador Dieter Boden Meets Ambassador  
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13. (C) On December 10 Dieter Boden had a follow-up meeting with the Ambassador and Embassy staff to review election monitoring plans with an eye to coordinating ODIHR, Embassy and other monitoring of the January 5 election. Boden said that ODIHR would have 28 Long Term Observers, most of whom will arrive this week, and 300 Short Term Observers who will arrive a few days before the election. Boden outlined two likely issues to watch: potential abuse of administrative resources and intimidation with regard to voting. On the first, Boden said that there needs to be a clear definition of what constitutes an abuse, with some things such as denial of convention facilities to opposition parties in the regions being obvious and others being less so. On the second, he said that intimidation is difficult to prove. He said his observers will be instructed to look into these things but make assessments based on hard evidence. The Ambassador agreed. USAID Director Bob Wilson outlined the \$5.5 million in USG assistance to advance free and fair elections, including efforts to study the feasibility of exit polls and to improve the quality of the voters' lists. Boden mentioned his concern about the presence of cameras in the polling

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stations, which the government is using to prevent tampering with ballot boxes. However, it was a consensus that so long as cameras are focused away from the polling booths there is little likelihood that ballot secrecy will be compromised. Boden also expressed concern about uncertainty and lack of control over voting at Georgian embassies in foreign countries. It was agreed that more information about the number of voters registered abroad and how the voting process will be controlled should be requested from the CEC.

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Ambassador Meets Conservative Party Leader Usupashvili  
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14. (C) On December 10 Conservative Party Leader David Usupashvili (please protect) met Ambassador to discuss Usupashvili's recent visit to London to meet opposition candidate and oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili. Usupashvili, traveling with two other opposition members, said that Patarkatsishvili offered to join the United Opposition in exchange for the position of Prime Minister. Usupashvili said that the United Opposition was split on whether to accept such an offer: while on the one hand it would guarantee another 10% of the vote, on the other many worried that Patarkatsishvili and his financial means would eclipse the rest of the opposition. Patarkatsishvili reportedly plans to use 1 billion USD in his own funds to support the start of small and medium enterprises in Georgia. Usupashvili also believed that Labor Party Leader Shalva Natelashvili would join the United Opposition, bringing his 5-7% of the voters, should Patarkatsishvili join. Ultimately, Usupashvili did not think the United Opposition could win without Patarkatsishvili's votes. He also thought that the United Opposition would not accept Patarkatsishvili's offer. Usupashvili said he had tried to reach out to Acting President Burjanadze to come to agreement on potential coalitions, protections for the losing party, and composition of the government based on various election outcomes. He indicated that Burjanadze was unable to talk freely in her office and accepted the Ambassador's offer to suggest that

Burjanadze meet Usupashvili at a mutually convenient location.

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Central Election Commission Registers Seven Candidates  
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15. (U) The Central Election Commission (CEC) registered seven out of 13 candidates who initially submitted the minimum of 50,000 signatures to the CEC. Mikheil Saakashvili, United National Council of opposition (UNC) Levan Gachechiladze, New Rightists Davit Gamkrelidze, Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili, Party of Hope Candidate Irina Sarishvili, Party of Future Gia Maisashvili, and oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili were registered. Political unknown Levan Kidzinidze's submission is still being verified by the CEC.

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Imedi TV to Resume Broadcast This Week  
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16. (U) Imedi TV will resume broadcasts the week of December 10 with limited news coverage, with plans for news bulletins every three hours (compared to each hour before the station's closure). Giorgi Targamadze, head of Imedi TV political programs, said he expected limited broadcasts to resume December 11 or 12. A test broadcast was done December 8 for 15 minutes but the station then went off the air and currently the station's logo is being broadcast. Targamadze said Imedi is working to restore damaged equipment in the studios, including the main studio's control unit, internal phone network and Internet connection. Targamadze said Imedi management was also working to replace several key anchors who left the station after it was shutdown, including Inga Grigolia and Eka Khoperia, who hosted the late night political talk show, On the Air. On December 7 Saakashvili's campaign spokesman, Davit Bakradze, said the National Movement will participate in political talk shows hosted by Imedi. This ends a year long boycott by the government and ruling party officials of political shows on Imedi.  
TEFFT